

What is PDA?

The term PDA stands for **Pathological Demand Avoidance**. This is widely understood to be a profile found within some autistic people. The most obvious characteristic of PDA is a determined avoidance of so-called “common” demands of life, including expectations and things the person enjoys doing.

This avoidance is often driven by **anxiety** or a **stress** response to demands, rather than choice.

PDAers may describe it as a tug of war between **brain, heart and body**.

Common characteristics of PDA include:

- Feeling overwhelmed by everyday expectations, even routine tasks.
- Using social strategies to avoid demands – like distraction, humour, or withdrawal.
- Appearing outwardly sociable, but struggling with deeper social connections.
- Experiencing intense emotions and a need for control.
- Having strong attachments to trusted people or favourite characters.
- Being imaginative, enjoying role play or masking through pretending.
- Feeling exhausted from masking or overcompensating.

As PDA is a profile for some autistic people but not all, it can mean that someone with this profile may need very different support to another autistic person without it. Even when people share the same profile, the way these characteristics show up can differ greatly. Each person’s personality, experiences, and environment shape how characteristics are expressed in daily life.

Why understanding PDA matters

PDA can have a big impact on daily life. It can make basic tasks feel impossible and lead to misunderstandings, especially if people assume it to be rooted in being oppositional or difficult on purpose.

What works for one person may not always work for another. **Support based on trust, collaboration, flexibility and low-demand approaches** makes a real difference and with the right understanding, many PDAers can and do thrive.

